Christianity:
The First Four Centuries
Baseline: Judaism ~30 CE

Judaism is NOT monolithic

Messianic Expectations

Roman View of gods
- Caesar Worship

Judaism... a *religio licita*
The Christian Sect of Judaism

• Beginnings
• Terminology... “Christ”... “Christian”...
• Jewish Christians reach out to gentiles
• Impact of Stephen
• Paul’s radical view of “Israel”
• Requirements for gentiles to join the Jewish Christian movement? Paul / Peter / James do NOT agree...
• Are Jewish Christians heretics?? Many thought so...
• A Tipping Point: Who provides the legal and community structure: Torah or the ruling empire?
• Nero’s Persecution of (Jewish?) Christians
First Jewish Revolt 66-70

Jewish Christians got outta’ Dodge…

Leading Jewish sage Yohanan ben Zakkai got outta’ Dodge

- Establishes Yavneh Academy
- Roman army under Titus destroys the temple in 70 CE.
- Hostilities mostly end in 70 CE.
- Zealots hang on at Masada until 73 CE.
First Jewish Revolt - Aftermath

- Vespasian & Flavian Family Exploit the Victory.
- Judaism remains a *religio licita*(!)
- Special tax imposed on Jews... *Fiscus Judaicus*.
  - Do Jewish Christians still want to be Jewish??
- Early issues regarding the nature of Jesus...
- Jews pay for the Coliseum... the Arch of Titus...
- 96 CE Emperor Nerva ruled that only the Jews who follow Torah must pay the *Fiscus Judaicus*.
- Impact on Judaism...
  - Yavnean era / Gamaliel II
  - Eighteen Benedictions / *Curse upon the Heretics*
Jewish Christian Movement… or… Christian Movement…

• ~90 CE; Most people struggle to differentiate Christians from Jews…

• Differing perspectives:
  – Jewish Perspective: - Christians rejected Torah
    - Are Christians really monotheistic?
  – Christian Perspective: Jews rejected God’s salvation through Jesus of Nazareth.
Sabbath to Sunday

Why “First Day” (Sunday) instead of Sabbath? Possible reasons…

- Differentiation from Jews
- Facilitate pagan conversion
- Essene influence
- Day of Jesus’ resurrection
Two Tipping Point Events…

- Curse against heretics in the Eighteen Benedictions.
- Gospel of John.
Gospel of John (~105 – 115 CE)

- Response to the curse against the heretics?
- No urgency to immediately convert the world.
- Mosaic Law is obsolete.
- John fights against…
  - Those who believe Jesus was only a man; and
  - Those who believe Jesus was only a spirit.
Ignatius of Antioch (~35 – 107 CE)

- Consecrated by Peter (?)
- First documented to refer to the **catholic** church.
- Coined the term *Christianismos*… Christianity.
- Judaism or Christianity… Pick One!
- Favored replacing Sabbath with Sunday.
- Declared the Hebrew scriptures – the Tanakh (“Old Testament”) – to be Christian documents.
- Eaten by lions in the Coliseum in Rome.
Jewish Revolt of 132-135 CE

- Conflicting reports as to the cause of the revolt...
  - Festering discontent from Temple destruction?
  - Pagan temple to be built on Temple Mount?

- Simeon bar-Kosebah a.k.a. Simeon bar-Kokhba...
  - "Son of a Star"

- Christians did not participate (and incurred the wrath of mainstream Jews in Judea.)
- Rome ignored Christians during this war.
- Rome crushed the revolt but with much loss of life.
Post – bar Kokhba Developments

• “Ethnic Cleansing” around Jerusalem.
  – Jews are banned; Christians are not.
• Judea is renamed “Syria Palestina.”
• Jewish deliverance will NOT be hastened by military or political action.
• Jewish militancy ends for 1800 years(!)
• Rome takes no other punitive action…
  – No attempt to abolish Judaism.
  – No abolishment of Judaism being a *religio licita*. 
Christianity After the Second Jewish Revolt

- Christian message gains momentum.
- *religio licita* no longer applies to Christians.
- Lowered emphasis on imminent End Times.
- Folkloric perspective of Judaism.

- OK… Christianity is “not-Judaism”… But what is it??
  - **Doctrine** is needed…
Marcion (~85 – 160 CE)

- Marcion’s beliefs...
  - Yahweh is a tribal God of the Jews.
  - Jesus revealed a higher spiritual God.
- Marcion rejected the OT and most new writings.
- But!... He provides the first Christian “canon”(!)
- Marcion is important because of:
  - His list of acceptable (to him…) scripture; and
  - His rejection of the Tanakh – the OT.
    - Church must decide… Is the Old Testament IN or OUT?
- Marcion is excommunicated; forms his own church.
- He forced the church to consider formation of a canon of sacred writings.
Gnosticism

• Gnosticism emerges in the 2nd century.
  – *Gnostic* means “one who knows.”

• Valentinus (~100-180 CE) ran the most influential “Christian” gnostic school in Rome.

• *Salvation* is the goal.
  – The key is *knowledge* of a lesser, creator god and a greater spiritual God, who was revealed by Jesus.
  – *Created stuff is BAD! Spiritual stuff is GOOD!*

• Gnostics claimed “special revelations.”

• Non-gnostic Christians reject Gnosticism; summarize their beliefs via the Apostle’s Creed.
The Apostles’ Creed

Christian response to Marcionism and Gnosticism…

I believe in God Almighty
And in Christ Jesus, his only Son, our Lord
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried
And the third day rose from the dead
Who ascended into heaven
And sits on the right hand of the Father
Whence he comes to judge the living and the dead.
And in the Holy Ghost
The holy church
The remission of sins
The resurrection of the flesh
The life everlasting.

Second Century early version; adapted from Old Roman Creed.
Justin Martyr (~100 – 165 CE)

- Adversary of Marcion and Valentinus.
- Wrote “Dialogue with Trypho”. Justin claims…
  - Christians replace Jews as “Israel.”
  - Jesus replaces Torah.
  - Jews curse Christians in the synagogues.
  - Jews executed God’s Messiah – Jesus.
  - God’s verdict: outcome of Second Jewish War.

- Trypho isn’t silent. He says Christians are blasphemers who worship two gods.

- Denounced by a rival philosopher; tried and executed ~165 CE.
The “FISH” Symbol

I χ Θ Y Σ
“fish” pronounced “ick-thus” in Greek

I  lesous  Jesus
Χ  Christos  Christ
Θ  Theou  God’s
Y  Yios  Son
Σ  Soter  Savior
Christian Issues ~ 200 CE

• Church Structure.
• Easter Controversy (When is Easter??)
• Bishop of Rome attempts to expand his authority.
• A sacred Christian language? Nope…
• How to deal with serious post-baptismal lapses.
Clement of Alexandria (~150 – 215 CE)

- Converted to Christianity ~180 CE.
- Headed a religious and philosophical school in Alexandria.
  - “Philosophy is preparation for Christianity.”
  - Prayer is conversation with God.
- Opposed Gnostics; venerated all creation.
- Maintained true “gnosis” is with Christians who display the virtues of faith and charity.
- Teacher of Origen.
- Persecution forced him from his school in early 200’s.
  - Left Origen in charge of the school.
Origen (~185 – 253 CE)

- Took over Clement’s school as a boy of 18 years old(!)
- Some accounts say he castrated himself.
  - He had female students and wanted no sexual slander.
- Supreme intellect; in demand throughout Roman world.
- Ordained in Caesarea; excommunicated by his miffed bishop in Alexandria.
  - After that, he made his home in Caesarea.
- Prolific writer; had seven(!) shorthand scribes who worked in relays.
- Taught that everyone – including Satan – would be reunited with God.
- Devoted to the church and Christianity; but nevertheless was condemned by the church as a heretic.
- Died ~253 CE after being tortured under Emperor Decius.
Persecution Under Decius (249-251 CE)

- Wants to return Rome to the glory days of yesteryear…
  - He believes Christian atheism(!) is the problem.
- Caesar worship is made mandatory (except for Jews).
- Christian options re Caesar worship…
  - Go into hiding.
  - Burn the pinch of incense and proclaim Caesar is Lord.
  - Accept torture or execution. Outcomes…
    - Die and be honored as a martyr.
    - Survive torture….
      - Proclaim Caesar is Lord and be guilty of apostasy.
      - Deny Caesar is Lord and be honored as a confessor.

- Persecutions stop in 251 CE when Decius is killed.
- Critical issue for the church:
  - What is to be done with “lapsed” Christians who want readmission to the church?
The Apostasy Issue…

- **Many** Christians were guilty of apostasy.
- A matter of penance?
- *Confessors* in Carthage contend their suffering should be extended to others.
  - Sets the future stage for indulgences.
- Cyprian (Carthage) and Cornelius (Rome) favor leniency and a system of penances.
- Novatian (Rome) favors a strict policy.
Roman Leadership…
First Thugs, then Diocletian

• Diocletian (284-305) instituted the tetrarchy…
  – Empire is divided into two halves, each with two rulers.
The Tetrarchy

Established and implemented 286 – 293 CE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Augustus</th>
<th>Caesar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>East</strong> (Nicomedia)</td>
<td><strong>Diocletian</strong></td>
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<td><strong>West</strong> (Trier)</td>
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Roman Leadership…
First Thugs, then Diocletian

- Diocletian (284-305) instituted the tetrarchy…
  - Empire is divided into two halves, each with two rulers.
- Christians are tolerated initially… but…
- The Great Persecution starts in 303.
- Diocletian abdicates in 305.
- His legacy…
  - Christians consider him a villain.
  - He revitalized the Roman Empire.
- Historians consider Diocletian one of the great Roman rulers.
The Tetrarchy of 305 CE

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<td>Maximinus</td>
<td>Constantius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severus</td>
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After 305, consult handout for evolution of the tetrarchy.
Constantine’s Rise to Power

• Constantius (Constantine’s father) dies in 306.
  – Galerius appoints Severus as Augustus of the West; accepts Constantine as Caesar of the West.

• Severus dies in 307.
  – Constantine and others claim to be Augustus of the West.
  – Maxentius (son of Maximian) takes Italy.

• Galerius (Augustus of the East) dies in 311.
  – Asks for Christian prayers(!)

• Licinius replaces Galerius as Augustus of the East.

• In 312, Constantine’s army marches on Maxentius and Rome.

• The stage is set for the Battle of Milvian Bridge.
Constantine’s Vision (312 CE)
Constantine Completes His Conquest

- In 313, Constantine and Licinius meet in Milan.
  - Constantine favors Christianity as a result of his vision.
  - Issue the *Edict of Milan*, granting religious freedoms.

- Licinius in the East; Constantine in the West... and BOTH want control of the entire Roman Empire.
  - In 322 the civil war is underway.
  - The armies meet in 324 in western Turkey.
    - Licinius put a religious twist to the conflict...
  - Constantine and his army win!

- Also in 324...
  - Constantine starts building “New Rome”... a.k.a. Constantinople
  - Orders his army to worship the Supreme God on Sundays.
Can Christianity Handle Victory?

• Christians can no longer assume doctrinal agreement.

• Some issues…
  – What should a Christian empire look like?
  – Is Christianity for everyone or only those “qualified?”
  – Role of clergy: administer rites or help others?
  – How much doctrinal unity is necessary?
  – Standardize aspects of the clergy?
  – Relationships..
    • Amongst church officials?
    • Between church officials and state officials?
  – Relationship of Jesus to mankind? To God?
Constantine & Christianity

• Attributes his good fortune to Christianity.
• Lifted Hadrian’s ban on Jews in Jerusalem.
• For the first time, Jews are under Christian rule.
Arian Controversy

The Issue: What was the nature of Jesus?
Arian Controversy

God

| Creation

Jesus
Logos
Word... Reason...

?
Arian Controversy:
The Early Players…

**Arius**: Priest in Baucalis (section of Alexandria, Egypt).

**Alexander**: Bishop of Alexandria.

**Athanasius**: Priest in Alexander’s church and aide to Alexander.

**Eusebius of Nicomedia**: Bishop of Nicomedia and arguably the premier leader of the Greek-speaking church.

**Eusebius of Caesarea**: Bishop of Caesarea; scholar; theologian; prolific writer.

**Constantine**: Emperor of Rome; secular leader of Church.
Nicene Creed (“Final”, as of 325 CE…)

We believe in one God, the father, almighty, **maker of all things visible and invisible**; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten from the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, **begotten not made**, of one substance *[homoousios]* with the father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who for us men and our salvation came down and became flesh, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit. **But as for those who say, “There was when he was not,” and “Before being born he was not,”** and that he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different reality of substance, or is subject to alteration or change – these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.
Sons of Constantine Rule… and Squabble…

- **Constantine II:**
  - Ruled France, Britain, & Spain; HQ in Trier.
  - Maybe pro-Nicene; historical record isn’t clear.

- **Constantius**
  - Ruled the East; HQ in Antioch.
  - Favored the Arian version of Christianity.

- **Constans**
  - Ruled Italy; HQ in Milan.
  - Favored the Nicene version of Christianity.
Constantius Wins the Empire

• Constantius (Arian) holds the East; Constans (Nicene) holds the West.
• Constans is overthrown and killed by his generals.
• Three years of war (350-353); Constantius wins.
• Seeks to unite the empire under the banner of Arian Christianity.
• Constantius needs a Caesar!
  – Picks his nephews. First Gallus; then Julian.
Athanasius Stands Firm; Arians Splinter

• In 355-360 CE Athanasius and Constantius battle for the hearts and minds of Christians…
  – Constantius: “Athanasius would only suffer the punishment he deserves if he were to be killed ten times over!”
  – Athanasius: “Constantius is worse than Saul, Ahab, and Pilate! He is no Christian; he is the Antichrist!”

• Arians splinter into three doctrinal camps…
  – Jesus was a divine being but not identical to God.
  – Jesus was some sort of lesser God.
  – God’s relation to Jesus is unknowable so Christians can disagree.
Religion Evolves; Athanasius Evolves

• “Religion” is becoming an inward faith; not merely a civic duty.

• Athanasius declares Arians are NOT enemies(!)
  – Potential for alliance with moderate Arians.

• Julian recognizes *Christian love* is a formidable enemy of the pagan gods.
  – Julian writes: “Atheism [Christianity!] has been especially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that… the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well, while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”
Jovian… We Hardly Knew Ya’

- Soldiers proclaim the Christian Jovian their commander and de-facto emperor of the Empire.

- Withdrew the defeated Roman army from Persia.

- Reestablished Christianity as Rome’s primary religion.

- Died after ruling for one year (363 – 364 CE)
  - Asphyxiated by a charcoal grill in his tent.
Impact of the Cappadocians

- Produced their greatest works in the 370’s.
- Clarified the “three-in-oneness” of God.
- Nicene Creed treated the words “essence” (*ousia*) and “being” (*hypostasis*) interchangeably.
  - A mistake, per the Cappadocians.
  - Must distinguish clearly between *ousia* and *hypostasis*.
- The Cappadocian solution:
  - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate beings.
  - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one essence.

- Jesus could be God without being a pretend-man.
- Jesus could be human without disappearing into God.
Aftermath of Valens’ Defeat

• God’s judgment, per the Nicene bishops.
• Revival of Roman power, started by Diocletian, was ending.
• **Survival** mattered... especially of one’s soul!
• Cappadocian doctrine aligned with people’s need for spiritual security.
  – Arianism withered away.
In the Roman Political Arena…

- Valentinian (Western Ruler) dies in 375 CE.
- Valentinian’s son Gratian (co-ruler) becomes Augustus of the West.
  - Studied Christianity under Ambrose.
- In early 379, Gratian appoints Theodosius to replace Valens in the East.
- Theodosius…
  - Spanish general
  - Practical; decisive
  - Studied Christianity under Ambrose.
The Amended Nicene Creed

Council of Nicaea 325 CE

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father; the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth.

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;

Who suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven,

from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

But those who say: “There was a time when he was not” and “He was not before he was made” and “He was made out of nothing”, or “He is of another substance” or “essence”, or “The Son of God is created;” or “changeable” or “alterable” – they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic church.

Council of Constantinople 381 CE

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was made incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.

from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

But those who say: “There was a time when he was not” and “He was not before he was made” and “He was made out of nothing”, or “He is of another substance” or “essence”, or “The Son of God is created;” or “changeable” or “alterable” – they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic church.

Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father **, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.

In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Red = Deletions from 325 version.

Blue = Additions made in 381 at Constantinople.
Aftermath of the Council of Constantinople

- Theodosius issues this edict (381 CE):

  We now order that all churches are to be handed over to the bishops who profess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of a single majesty, of the same glory, of one splendor, who establish no difference by sacrilegious separation, but who affirm the order of the Trinity by recognizing the Persons and uniting the Godhead.

- In 381, Ambrose led a similar council in Italy.
- No pushback by Arians… They’re obsolete…
- Theodosius protected Jewish rights.

- All is well until 390. Then Thessalonica happens…
Ambrose denies Communion to Theodosius (~390 CE)

Painting by Peter Paul Rubens & his pupil Anthony van Dyck ~1616
Augustine (~353 – 430 CE)

1483 painting by Michael Pacher
Council of Chalcedon (451 CE)

- Established relationship between the divine nature and human nature of Jesus...
  - “…complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, … in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation… coming together to form one person.”
  - “…a single Person in two natures” became standard orthodoxy for most Christians.
    - Armenian Church, Coptic Church, & Jacobite Church disagree.

- Locked down foundational Christian doctrines re salvation and the nature of Jesus.
- Latin and Greek churches disagreed over inclusion of the “filioque”… the words “and the Son” in the Nicene Creed.
Bishop of Rome Becomes… Pope…

• What made Rome’s bishop… POPE??
• “Pope” Innocent the First (402 – 417)
• “Pope” Boniface the First (418 – 422)
• Pope Leo the First a.k.a. “the Great” (440 – 461)
  – Provided a doctrinal basis for supremacy of Rome…
    • Jesus bestowed supreme authority on Peter.
    • Peter’s authority was passed down to his successors.
    • All other bishops receive their authority not directly from Jesus, but from Jesus through Peter… or Peter’s successors.

• Eastern churches never accepted the supremacy of the Pope in Rome.
I hope you have found this journey interesting and informative.

Ray Morgan